

# Norfolk Community Foundation

The Earl of Northampton's Charity  
Older People & Housing Programme

## Helping to tackle older people's loneliness in Norfolk, especially those who are financially disadvantaged

**Norfolk Community Foundation (NCF)** manages the Connecting Older People Fund, which was established in 2019 as a partnership with the Mercers' Company. The fund focuses on reducing loneliness and isolation among older people, particularly those facing financial hardship. It supports local projects in Norfolk that help older people stay connected with their communities and address poverty, with priority given to initiatives in the most disadvantaged areas. Grants of up to £10,000 are available for projects lasting one year.

*"Projects [are funded] that understand the people they work with and have an ongoing connection."  
Project lead*

## Why the work is needed

Norfolk has a larger older population than other areas in England with one third of the population of North Norfolk being aged 65 and over. The number of older people in Norfolk is projected to increase at a greater rate than the rest of England. Due to the rural nature of Norfolk and lack of accessible public transport; loneliness and social isolation are common. These are outcomes that are linked to poor mental health in older people.

## Approach

The partnership between the Mercers' Company and NCF is seen as an effective way of reaching and funding smaller, local good quality older people's projects in Norfolk. In selecting projects to fund, NCF focus on those that address the priorities of the fund (to help alleviate loneliness and isolation).

### Funding has contributed to:

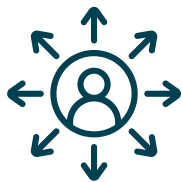
- Low-cost accessible community transport
- Activities e.g. workshops, expanding a lunch club
- An Advisor to conduct 1:1 financial health checks
- Venue running costs
- Part time staff member
- Expanding two monthly Dementia Support Groups

### Projects supported include:

- Age Connected Great Yarmouth
- Norwich Men's Shed
- Sing Your Heart Out
- Upwell & Outwell Age Concern Luncheon Club



# Impact



## Growing Reach:

To date NCF has used this fund to help 70 charities supporting older people in Norfolk. 19 charities or projects were supported in 2023/24.

NCF's local knowledge, insight and connections are important for identifying relevant organisations to support.



## Benefits of administering the fund in this way include:

- Access to monies for small organisations who would not be eligible to apply directly to the Mercers' Company.
- Access to monies to continue or develop work dedicated to supporting older people.
- Raising the profile of smaller organisations with other funders.
- Increased skills and capacity for some organisations, for example, in accessing additional funding.

***"We've been able to introduce [the Mercers' Company] to lots of organisations, some of which they're now funding directly" Project Lead***



## Challenges

Local needs related to poverty and loneliness amongst older people are high and continue to rise. Demand for the funding is high and the fund is increasingly oversubscribed. In 2024, 50 applications were received and 19 were funded. Some of the projects indicated they would benefit from longer term funding.

Rural areas also face some unique challenges of reduced transport and services for older people. Therefore, new and existing projects must consider how participants will access their services, and how to best provide support against a limited backdrop of services to signpost onto.

## Learnings

- Using a local intermediary to distribute funds from a Mercers' Company Charity differs from the more usual direct funding to projects
- There are clearly advantages to both methods, with the intermediary method ensuring that smaller charities are noticed and funded, and the direct method opening up clearer opportunities for growth and additional funding.

## The Future

- NCF plan to continue the work and believe that the local need remains high.
- There are many other organisations identified who would benefit from the funding.

***'Mercers' Company are very knowledgeable... very engaged and interested in everything we present...and that in itself is really rewarding.'***